

Lainer of the Cavalry

By
Gen. Chas. King
Author of "The Colonel's
Baughter," "Foes in Ambush,"
etc.

CHAPTER IX.

ONE more witness appeared before this court that day and with him the tall, elderly civilian who had arrived from the east. Mr. Arnold came in with a very puzzled look in his face.

"Thank you for coming, Mr. Arnold," said Riggs, with bluff civility. "Pray take this chair, sir. As I have explained to you, Mr. Lowndes, your nephew could not be compelled to testify before a military court and need not make public admission here of what he told us at Rawdon's demand during our journey hither. I hope this is fully understood."

Mr. Arnold cleared his throat, and he began:

"My unhappy nephew realizes with I trust, genuine contrition that he has been the cause of grave trouble, not only to us, his kindred in the east, but—er—to you military gentlemen in the west. He has, prompted, as we must admit, by Mr.—Mr. Rawdon, made a clean breast of his lamentable conduct and has promised Mr. Rawdon to repeat every word of it—er—to Colonel Button, but as his—"

"Then we'll waste no time," said Riggs impatiently. "We'll have him in, and I can catch the afternoon train. Ah, come in, Mr. Lowndes. Sit down, sir."

It was but a dejected specimen of a college bred man that sank into the chair in front of Riggs.

"Mr. Lowndes," said Riggs abruptly, "there is no need of going over the entire story. I'll ask you to answer certain questions. Who was your earliest friend in this regiment?"

The dreary eyes turned once more toward Bob, and the nervous hands started the slouch hat in swifter revolution.

"EML Lanier, sir."

"How came that?"

"I knew he was of my college fraternity before I entered college, and I showed him my pin and certificate."

"That insured a welcome, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir. He made me at home in his quarters—and tent."

"Shared the best he had with you—home, food, drink, even clothes and money—I'm told."

"It is all true, sir."

"Yet you quarreled with him during the campaign."

"I lost money gambling, and he wouldn't lend me any more."

"Did you ever pay what he had lent you?"

"Not—yet, sir."

"Even after your quarrel did he not aid you?"

"Yes, at Laramie. I didn't seem to have any friend left by that time and had to go to him for help when they wired me to come home."

"In point of fact, he enabled you to get \$100 at Laramie?"

"Yes; I gave my note and he gave his word."

"What did you do with the money?"

"Tried to win back some that I had lost at poker and lost most of what I had raised. I suppose I'd have lost all of it if Rawdon hadn't caught me playing and pulled me out."

"You owed him still more?"

"Nearly \$200, sir."

"Did you go home?"

"I couldn't. I had only enough to bring me to Cushing, and they wouldn't send me any more. I had to go to the ranch and stay."

with the first cap he could reach, and I followed, knowing now it wasn't fire, but robbery. Then when I realized no life was in danger I remembered I was in arrest, dropped the chase and went straight to my quarters. Both hands were bruised and left badly cut. I am sorry, of course, to have struck Sergeant Fitzroy, but the language he used was vile, and it seemed to me the only way to convince him I was not Trooper Rawdon."

"Colonel Button, have you any questions?" demanded Riggs.

"Why didn't you tell me this?" demanded Button.

"I should have been glad to, colonel. Indeed, I tried to the last time I was in the office."

"Well, gentlemen," said the colonel, "we seem to have stirred up a pretty kettle of fish." Yet even Snaife disowned complicity. He always had said Lanier was a perfect gentleman.

And so ended Bob's arrest. Rawdon lingered for a word with Cassidy, Quinlan and poor remorseful Rafferty;

then followed, unhampered even by his arch enemy, Fitzroy, who slipped away to the stables three minutes after the close of the conference. But he was not even there when, along in the spring, Mr. and Mrs. Rawdon came out for a visit to Dr. Mayhew. Like Rawdon, he had received his discharge. Unlike Rawdon, there was serious objection to his re-enlistment. Even Snaife dare not "take him on" again.

It was not until mid-May that the bodies of the missing were found save that of Cary. Cary, who, having been given up for lost, turned up most unexpectedly the very day that Fitzroy, applicant for re-enlistment, was summarily turned down. But Cary came not of his own volition. He marched with a file of the guard. Cary's story was simple enough. Rawdon and Lowndes had hardly got away on the train when Sergeant Stowell and his party came searching. Cary hid. He

was still half drunk. Some one told him of Kelly's arrest and charged him with that and with running off the Fosters' sleigh. He dared not face the music. He forgot his precious misdeed to Dora Mayhew until next day. Then the storm held him. Not until the fire night did he summon up courage to sneak home. He had no money left and could buy no more liquor. He stole into Lanier's back door to return the civilian suit and recover the cavalry blouse and trousers left hanging in Rafferty's room. He could hear the lieutenant moving about overhead. He had to strike a light. He struck several matches, found the clothes, slipped out of the "cits" and into his own. He was cold and numb. He knew there was liquor on the sideboard in the middle room. The crane was on him, and he risked the burning stumps to the floor, drank his fill, then stumbled away, intending to give himself up to his first sergeant for absence without leave. Back round by way of the store and the east front he went, but before he could reach the barracks came the appalling cry of fire—Lanier's quarters—his doing beyond doubt, and now, in dismay and terror, he fled from the post. Poor Cary had Lanier to plead for him before his trial, but three months' hard labor was the least the law would allow.

(To Be Continued.)

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